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FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8502

INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE

RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0103

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000215

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TAGS: PGOV KISL KDEM SOCI SCUL OEXC NI ELECTIONS

SUBJECT: INSIDER'S VIEW OF ABUJA MUSLIM COMMUNITY

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Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4 (b & d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: On January 31, PolOff met with Abuja-based Imam and 2005 International Visitor Program grantee Fouad Adeyemi, founder and director of al-Habibiyah Islamic Society. Imam Fouad disclosed that he is presently teaching a course on the fundamentals of Islamic worship and belief to members of the Nigerian Muslim elite in Abuja. He discussed the moderating influence of the bi-monthly meetings of Abuja-based Imams and other Islamic leaders. Imam Fouad also intimated that his perceived close association with Embassy Abuja since 2005 has garnered him mistrust from other Muslim leaders. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) Imam Fouad revealed that he is currently teaching a course entitled the "Culture of Islam," which aims to "Islamize social practice and behavior" and is primarily targeted at educating the Nigerian Muslim elite. He claims that prominent students are participating in the four-month training, including the Director General of the State Security Service (SSS), Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, and business leaders. The overarching purpose of the course is to introduce the fundamentals of Islamic religious praxis to an audience with little to no familiarity of Islam. Sessions take place daily in the early and late evenings. The Imam is planning also to offer similar courses in Lagos and Port Harcourt.

¶13. (C) Similar to other northern Nigerian cities, Abuja is replete with mosques, differing in ideology and purpose. While most Nigerian Muslims adhere to the Maliki school of law, others have recently adopted the Saudi version of Islam, disseminated through Imams educated in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Moreover, mosques are differentiated by function: (1) Jumuah mosque, used primarily for Friday prayer services; and (2) Masjid al-ratib, used for daily prayers and teaching circles. Most teachers or mallams have studied abroad, funded by foreign governments, and return to Nigeria after 3-4 years of study in the leading Islamic universities of the Muslim world, including Cairo's al-Azhar, Fez's Qarawiyyin, and Makkah's Umm ul-Qurra. Imam Fouad noted that those who study in Saudi Arabia, upon their return to Nigeria, routinely espouse virulent anti-American sentiment, "politicizing their religious studies." In order to moderate such extremism, Abuja's leading Imams and mallams convene bi-monthly to reach consensus on issues pertinent to the Muslim community. While formal declarations are rarely pronounced, the council addresses political developments, inter-communal relations, and a range of other religious topics.

¶4. (C) Imam Fouad intimated that, at recent meetings, council members have expressed suspicion over his organization's activities, perceiving him and al-Habibiyah Islamic Society as close allies of Embassy Abuja. (Note: Embassy Abuja first encountered Imam Fouad in 2005, at which time the Public Affairs Section nominated him for the International Visitor Program, after learning of his anti-American views. Subsequently, Embassy Abuja has collaborated with him on several projects including the 2005 and 2006 Ramadan Outreach events in Abuja. End Note.) Although he contends that his association with the USG has damaged his image and influence in the Muslim community, he remains steadfast in asserting publicly his high regard for American ideals and respect for religious diversity.

¶5. (C) When asked about the Muslim community's views on 2007 elections, Imam Fouad admitted that while most of his Muslims congregants are skeptical that elections will hold by the stated timetable, they will not resort to violence should their "preferred candidate" General Buhari not win at the polls. He added that although pre- and post-elections violence is imminent, particularly in Kaduna and Kano, tensions will be calmed through the intervention of local traditional rulers (i.e. Emir of Zazzau, Kano) and local Islamic leaders.

¶6. (C) When asked about the state of inter-tribal relations among the various Muslims in Abuja, Imam Fouad remarked that al-Habibiyah Islamic Society, in concert with other Muslim organizations in Abuja, has attempted over the past few years to minimize inter-tribal differences (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, etc.) by advocating mixed congregations for Abuja's mosques.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Imam Fouad, originally from Osun State and
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educated by his Nigerian-trained father, believes that he influences broad sectors of the Muslim community through his frequent travels and media appearances throughout Nigeria. Though at one time he endorsed anti-American views, Imam Fouad has moderated his tone and critical stance especially following his 2005 visit to the United States. While we do not know the extent of the Imam's influence and notoriety, it is obvious that his positive impression of America and consistent willingness to speak publicly about his admiration for American ideals has affected his congregants' perspective vis-a-vis the United States, all the while sowing distrust in the minds of other already critical Muslim leaders. END
COMMENT.
CAMPBELL